DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 861 CG 007 566

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TITLE	Management of Paraprofessionals: Delivery of Professional Human Services.
PUB DATE	Apr 72
NOTE	21p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Community Relations; Family School Relationship; *Human Relations; *Nonprofessional Personnel; *Paraprofessional School Personnel; *Parent Child Relationship; School Aides; *School Community Relationship; Student School Relationship; Teaching Assistants
IDENTIFIERS	New York; SPAN Rochester

ABSTRACT

The intention of this paper was to propose certain principles and strategies for the "professional" use of paraprofessionals in education. It was stated that uncredentialed persons on school district payrolls are given few genuine opportunities to interact professionally with children, parents, and helping agencies, thus creating a waste of resources and a form of discrimination. These conclusions are supported and alternatives are offered by the reporting of observations gleaned from participation in programs utilizing paraprofessionals. The primary source referred to was School Parent Advisors to the Neighborhood (SPAN), a project based in Rochester, New York, that employs 33 adults as home-school-community relations workers. SPAN is a consistent, visible bridge between school and neighborhood. The 33 SPAN workers work with staffs of public and parochial, elementary, pre-kindergarten and secondary schools. They work toward a number of goals, most importantly at motivating and involving parents in dealing with the educational needs of their children. (Author/BW)

ED 068861

MANAGEMENT OF PARAPROFESSIONALS: DELIVERY OF PROFESSIONAL HUMAN SERVICES

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School-Parent Advisors to the Neighborhood

City School District of Rochester, New York

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49th Annual Meeting

AMERICAN ORTHOPSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION

Detroit, Michigan April 6, 1972

CG 007 566

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INTRODUCTION:

That economically poor children are socially disadvantaged is easily demonstrated. The evidence is the stuff of proposals and the compensatory projects that follow.

Often, the authors of such projects limit their vision to the gap between the achievements by children of the ghetto and those of middle class circumstances. They are skillful at correlating poverty, race and low achievement. The resulting projects however, (especially those in education) are keyed to the achievement and performance deficiencies. Racially and poverty imposed stigma are seldom considered for major committments of local, regional or federal resources. The point is that people who influence the accumulation of wealth, the use of real estate, the making and enforcing of laws, the sight, sound and biases of mass communications, worlds very different than that of racial minorities and other poor people.

Ghetto schools measure success by the number of youths that escape their oppressive surroundings. Escapee and school struggle to compensate against the visible influences of the ghettoes. Currently, court ordered and voluntary exercises in integration somewhat overshadow individual escapee initiative. Both elements taken together over emphasize escape leaving little energy for teaching the school and its neighbors how to get the oppression off their backs.

In quest of research dollars school systems abetted by universities (who get massive rakeoffs for overhead) identify and label people as disadvantaged. Yet, neither seems inclined to help groups understand why they are disadvantaged. More importantly, institutions of learning don't deal in how people can gain control of their environment, or how they can acquire tools for management of it, or, in how to transform it into something that will revive and sustain life rather than perpetuate disadvantage.

Neither teachers, nor school administrators, nor mental health clinicians; Nay, not even professors or doctors have demonstrated commitment to teach to the needs of disadvantaged populations. Those needs have to do with survival: How to survive the debilitating effects of poverty; the suffocating pollution of the ghetto, el barrio, the reservation, the stigma inherited and that which is imposed by society's inconsistencies. Compensatory projects range from tutoring, to reading mobilization, to instructional concerts by symphony orchestras. They embrace pre-school through graduate school populations. Whereas, they concentrate on that which can be managed in the academic motif, the ghetto residents labor under burdens which coalesce in the minds of many as the monolith variously described as "the system", "the man", "whitey", etc.

These projects have value in that they keep a lot of people busy--kids, staff, proposal writer--and anxious. The focus is on the project. Fitting it into or adding it onto the "standard" school program, maintains the illusion that a few more kids may be able to escape. Indeed,

educational goals somehow always allude to someone becoming a productive member of society (as is). Cynics interpret this as the assumption that most youths will emerge from the school processing apparatus somewhere between their 16th and 22nd birthdays and pledge allegiance to the flag and General Motors. Today, there are fewer examples to uphold that fantasy.

A generation ago society still tended to absorb its failures. Youths with ability but low achievement found their way into craft unions. Those with less ability or fewer strategically placed relatives, went to the assembly lines at G.M. and Ford. For others, military service was a way out.

The young men of Appalachia grew old in the played out coal mines. Blacks, denied adequate housing, health care, schooling and public safety, having no relatives to sponsor them in the trade unions, packed the urban ghettoes or were caught up in the fantasies described in Frazier's Black Bourgeoisie.[2]

In spite of abilities of King and Malcolm. In spite of Bigger Thomases* and celluoid Sidney Poitiers; in spite of super-niggers, blacks are seen as exotics and misfits. Indeed, many black boys struggling to be, weaken and fall prey to that image.

The record of black adjustment to physical, economic, psychological and cultural oppression is the record of America itself. It is a record of failure.

* Refers to the doomed principal character in Richard Wright's classic Native Son[4]

LESSONS FROM ATTICA, 1971

The cost of continued failure is too high for this nation to pay. Nobody wanted the Attica massacre. But its causes and consequences dog our every step. It appears that penal reformers, revolutionaries and reactionaries alike are willing to invest in some kind of continuation of the outside observer role, a situation whereby, civilians, i.e. persons not usually associated with prisons, become official, regular visitors.

Whatever forms these propositions take their value will be realized to the degree inmate and correctional officer feel the presence of the public. If the observers are broad in representation and deep in people who can communicate with the inmate; if they can evolve and maintain a code of observer behavior, a self discipline, then their presence can compel both inmate and correctional officer to be on their best behavior. Practicing this investment in their own propaganda would, over time, become reality.

In the tragedy of Attica there is curriculum material for ghetto schools. Schools, in trying to manage large numbers of youths adopt an impersonal posture; they anticipate crisis rather than education. Regimentation in ghetto schools is not unlike that for prison populations. In the main both populations have similar childhood and youth experiences.

There is an abundance of sociological data on the black experience in the ghetto and with institutions. Much of it concentrates on the pathology of the ghetto. Unfortunately, institutions, particularly school systems and universities, do not critically study that one-sided view.

More tragically, these institutions make no systematic study of the ghetto family's methods of coping, reasons for adapting to and particular responses to hostilities in the environment.

SPAN--FAMILY ADVOCATE

SPAN - School-Parent Advisors to the Neighborhood - serves as a link between those families and public institutions, particularly the City School District of Rochester. Ninety-eight percent of its members are parents of children attending inner city schools.

SPAN is a family advocate. Its foundation rests on the contention that for ill or good, a particular child's family setting is the principal channel for development of the attitudes, values and habits that nurture or erode his gift of life.

SPAN workers* enter into the lives of family units for the express purpose of helping them deal with burdens that interfere with their child-shaping roles.

SPAN workers conduct much of their work in the neighborhood and outside regular school hours. Indeed, they are accessible to parents for more hours than they are paid. They connect families with helping agencies; they inform, coax and monitor such agencies in the agencies' interactions with families.

The 50 SPAN workers operate mainly in Rochester's ghetto areas. They attempt to open lines of communication between families and the schools. SPAN work includes but is not limited to acting on referrals from principals, school social workers, deans of students, etc.

* Also called parent advisors

However, even as the referrals are acted upon there is a responsibility to keep the focus of parents and school personnel on their joint responsibility to resolve problems.*

Functionally, their work closely parallels the job description of the dean of students for secondary schools. But, whereas candidates for SPAN are recruited on the basis of closeness of social distance, neighborhood residence, etc., the principal requirement for deans is that they hold a masters degree. Moreover, as there are no residence requirements, deans generally are white suburbanites:

> JOB SUMMARY-DEAN OF STUDENTS, SECONDARY STUDENTS-"Under the general supervision of the Principal, the Deans are responsible for school wide discipline and resolution of related student problems. They assume leadership in establishing and maintaining an atmosphere conducive to learning and social growth. They are the school's main liaison with the home and community agencies. [my emphasis] The dean also focuses attention on methods of working with the student body to help develop codes and student responsibility." (Provided by the Personnel Office, City School District of Rochester).

Of the several functions cited in the dean's job description, they as a class to put most of their energies into that of disciplining

* Social worker, guidance counselor and attendance teacher, all professional jobs, have functions that SPAN workers ocassionally perform. Sometimes the professional seeks and welcomes this activity. Sometimes they call it interference.

students. While they might argue that as the overwhelming need we see their interpretation as helping to maintain the school as a constricting institution, concerned less about student development than about the status quo. For example:

> One SPAN worker assigned to J. Edgar Heever High School asked the dean of girls for the names and addresses of all the girls currently excluded from school because of pregnancies. The SPAN worker was prepared to visit each girls' home, assist her in getting various services, e.g., tutoring, prenatal medical care and counselling, etc.
>
> The dean reluctantly surrendered the list, emphasizing, "Why waste your time on them. They are nothing but a lot of problems and trouble. They're better off out of school."
>
> The SPAN worker persisted; she involved herself with the families of eight pregnant girls. Five eventually graduated from high school. Two are college.

A degree connotes that its bearer has "prepared" himself. The label, "Professional" is assigned to persons who, upon achieving certain units of university experience, a certain facility with language of their chosen field, exercise presumed skills in exchange for salaries and other benefits.

Deans' salaries are likely to exceed $17,000 per ten month school year. SPAN workers, like most of Rochester's paraprofessionals in city schools have a ceiling of $3.28 per hour. Extra compensation, when allowed, may enable the worker to gross wages of $4,900 per year.

During the 1970-71 school year the principal of B.T.W. Senior High School was compelled to find a substitute for his dean of girls, an aging matron who had suddenly cracked under pressure.

The principal selected a person who knew the school, was respected by students and staff and was the..."main liaison with the home. After consulting with SPAN's director, he assigned a thirty year old mother of five, as acting dean of girls. "Mama Hazel", as she is affectionately known, served in the role for four days.

She found the job tough, particularly since some students and many faculty expected her to be remote and unsympathetic or over-solicitous (to students). Indeed, she was somewhat anxious for not playing the disciplinarian role according to tradition. Nevertheless, the principal volunteered that she performed as a positive, responsible, functionary, maintaining the image that had attracted him in the first place.

Despite this commendable performance, Mama Hazel was replaced, as the system requires, by a new person with masters degree credentials. Moreover, a long hearalded but not yet operational career lattice, does not promise her a shortened route to recognition consistent with her present capabilities.

But what is the main distinction between paraprofessional and professional? Operational definitions of terms encompassed in the title of this paper may sharpen the focus. The terms Human Service, Professional, Paraprofessional and Para will be defined first. Definition of the term Management will emerge later.

DEFINITIONS:

1. Human Services: Services essential to maintaining the minimal quality of life consistent with national and or community (i.e., municipality) standards for health, public safety, schooling, economics, shelter. These standards are thought of as being mandated by local ordinances, state education laws, property conservation and building codes; by community pride and expectations as it compares itself to other locales. These services reportedly are delivered by and through local government bureaus which in turn are buttressed by a plethora of social services agencies, many of which operate on membership fees, on special government grants or combinations thereof. Persons who prescribe the mode and content of services delivery are viewed as professionals.

2. Professionals: A qualitative term relating to skills, attitudes and job description as ascribed to a certain percentage of workers, i.e., service providers. Usually, such workers are presumed to be, indeed initially represent themselves as professionals on the basis of their credentials. Credentials may include licensing and other kinds of certification. More frequently, it is thought of as acquisition of a college degree, especially if the Professional's college major has been in some area of job specialization, e.g., education. Moreover, professionals deliver their services from a place or facility, i.e., office, laboratory, center. Teachers teach in school buildings.

3. Paraprofessional: Suggesting worker capability of less than professional (quality). Synonyms: Aide; trainee; amateur, uncredentialed. Paraprofessionals are frequently used as go-betweens, i.e., as contact persons--people who get the client prepared to receive the real thing, i.e.,

the actual service.

Paraprofessionals sometimes are expected to negotiate for the client. These qualities are not routinely associated with institutionalized training. Even those training activities under auspices of colleges do not equate with standard college course work, particularly that acquired by matriculating students.

Paraprofessionals (are enrolled) come from a broad milieu. Some have had several kinds of work experience, some have attended college or taken individual college courses. The popular view of paraprofessionals suggests that the overwhelming majority of enrollees are from poverty neighborhoods and have very limited work experiences. Indeed, many are selected on this basis. Thus, the CAA organization et. al., are seen as employment agencies, especially for those who want to "work with people".

The "work with people" testimonial carries with it quite a bit of jive. Persons seeking such employment, i.e., as paraprofessionals in human services, detect the jive aspects and play the game accordingly. Little cerebral work is expected of paraprofessionals. Disciplined approaches to problem solving are not seriously encouraged. Paraprofessionals are not supposed to make decisions. Paraprofessionals carefully guard such prerogatives.

4. PARA: A term undergoing definition - extracted from the more familar term, paraprofessional. Useful, we think, in dealing with the identity problem (built into) dropped on those individuals lacking credentials, but who are "together" enough to: 1) recognize specific human (client) needs; 2) be knowledgeable about community resources (including those of his agency) and how they can be employed to meet client need. 3) Can realistically assess his own attributes and potential.

4) Consistently makes judgements about services that pay off on behalf of clients (even when the potential for retributive actions by upstaged professionals is high). This quality of judgement shines through in the following example:

> The social worker at South Junior High School referred M.M. a twelve year old girl to the SPAN worker at that school. The SPAN worker, A.M., was advised that M.M. had taken ill in most of her classes, the symptoms (including a swollen abdomen) suggesting the strong possibility that she was pregnant. The social worker had visited the mother urging her to have M.M. examined for evidence of pregnancy. The mother was alarmed at this conclusion, especially since she believed that her daughter had not "entered womanhood." The social worker took the position that mother was ignorant and that mother and daughter were not competent to make health judgements.
>
> The SPAN worker, with some trepidation visited the home. As mother of girls and boys from pre-school to a college junior, she used these assets to establish rapport with mother, grandmother and daughter. She pointed out that, the causes of the illness had not been medically diagnosed, and that whatever their causes they were in need of attention. The child, who maintained she was not pregnant, favored the idea. She reasoned that it would stop the teasing by school mates and the questions by certain teachers. Mother came around on the basis of proving

the school wrong.

The SPAN worker donated half the bus fare for the clinic visit and assured the family that she would stand by them whatever the outcome. The medical examination results were positive for a tumor.

Given the tradition-bound institutions many paraprofessionals work for, it is difficult to see the Para, as we describe him, clearly emerge. Enroute to discovering personal talents he may experience:

1. the belief that his agency or project has a mission to fulfill, rather than see it simply as providing him income.

2. the belief that his agency or project is committed to its stated objectives, consistent with helping "his", i.e., the Para's people.

3. discovery of the gap between agency promise and delivery

4. personal desire to emphasize the agency's problems, i.e., budget inadequacies, oppressive superstructure, etc.

5. a loss of patience with agency rationalizations

6. the conclusion that his agency is not serious about freeing itself to meet people needs.

7. a turning inward (psychologically), a falling back on his sense of patriotism, i.e., a "for my people" obsession.

8. a labelling of his agency as racist or Tom, establishment or bourgeoisie.

At times there are grotesque, persistent reinforcements of these views. Some are: 1) agency maintaining nine to five hours in the face of other client needs; 2) seasonal and cyclinal funding*, stimulated by planned demonstrations, street disorders, etc., 3) Permanency of

* SPAN, under federal ESEA funding, operates ten to eleven months, minus unpaid teachers recesses at Christmas, Easter, etc.

"storefront" services delivery style (i.e., exotic, token, superficial), epitomized by an Afro-wigged, big breasted receptionist, legs crossed, nail file working to the rhythm of W-SOUL*, who, caught in the radio's narcotocizing clutch, condescends to ask, "What chu want?"

Paraprofessionals also take note of these features. Some simply shrug them off. Others get stuck on the behavior of certain of their peers, rather than that of the agency, associating their behavior with themselves and their disadvantaged clients. But a Para will remain concerned about the quality of the agency's services delivery.

SPAN workers labor under the burdens of low pay for long hours; a not yet functioning career lattice; a bargaining agent created without their involvement and whose leadership projects the image of a company union.

Moreover, the hazards of the ghetto crowd in on SPAN families, too: Five SPAN workers are carriers of sickle cell trait, and have children or spouses that suffer sickle cell anemia** Three families have lead poisoning victims. Their sons get strung out on skag, get hasseled by

* Signifying white-owned, controlled and profit making.

** An hereditary trait found mainly among people of African decent. Especially under conditions of stress, red blood cells, "sickle" or distort, clogging the small blood vessels. Pain is severe, crippling during these short range (hours to several weeks) "pain crises". Life expectancy for persons with sickle cell anemia is about thirty years. Ten percent of Afro-Americans are carriers. One in five hundred have sickle cell anemia. The long time neglect of the problem suggests another example for racism.

police. Their daughters get assaulted, their teenagers kicked out of school unjustly. They are Black, Puerto Rican and Indian.

They get hounded by thugs and thieves who are Negro and Spanish speaking. Spouses get jealous of their SPAN workers growth and the energies expended outside the home. Naturally, there is a residue of defensiveness. For some there is:

1. lack of confidence in their abilities to wrestle with and implement complex ideas. The resulting behavior is often extreme, i.e., submissive or blatantly hostile.

2. reluctance to accept leadership assignments. A SPAN worker will often risk the breakup of his home for a client but seldom the ire of his peers.

ORGANIZATION OF SPAN

Each SPAN worker is available to the schools in his area for six half days each week. The schools benefit from the services of persons, who, because of neighborhood residence are more readily acceptable to parents than someone residing outside their neighborhood. The project supervisors emphasize this advantage. Each successful contact and feedback enables the SPAN worker to increase the mutality of respect between the worker and the school staff. The SPAN worker enhances his ability to observe behavior of school staff and children.

He can and does advise those professionals who will listen. In several instances the presence of SPAN workers has been a deterrent to overt, potentially bloody actions planned by residents of neighborhoods receiving their first busloads of Black and Puerto Rican teenagers.

The four remaining half school days are reserved for structured community involvement. Presently, this centers around the problem of childhood lead poisoning. Teams go door to door in the lead belt area

intoducing themselves, distributing informational fliers, setting up a basis for continous interaction. On a second visit the paint in a home is tested for evidence of lead. Children six years and under are referred to medical facilities for testing and/or medical supervision.

This participation in lead poisoning prevention and control is of course extremely valuable to families of at risk children. It prevents serious health problems from occuring or worsening. It saves lives. Additionally, it gives SPAN workers increased standing in most areas of the Rochester community. It is thus far SPAN's best tool for staff training and for evaluation of results.

Childhood lead poisoning is basically a disease of the slums. It is of epidemic proportions. Nationally, an estimated 200,000 to 400,000 children are damaged annually.[3] In Rochester an estimated 10 to 14 percent* of inner city pre-school children are being damaged.

SPAN is uniquely suited to fight this disease since workers have everyday contact with residents of the lead belt, in most instances are themselves parents of young children, and are representatives of an institution known to all. Moreover, the consequences of lead poisoning are often impairment of learning abilities. This factor alone, i.e., the removal or prevention of barriers to learning, is SPAN's overall objective.

SPAN has good liaison with building inspectors, health centers, health department, etc. Indeed, SPAN legitimizes the belated presence of the institutions these persons work for.

* Based on preliminary results from a May-June, 1971, random survey of children undertaken by University of Rochester's medical school, Rochester Neighborhood Health Center, Monroe County Health Department, SPAN workers also participate.

A pair of SPAN workers may be forced to make several visits to a home before achieving sufficient rapport to confirm the existence of lead paint and to persuade the family to have its younger children tested. In the process the workers are alert to other physical hazards and to opportunities to render additional service. The best of our workers are able to break through the reserve and suspicion and achieve a level of trust that has long range effects. For example, last summer SPAN workers tested nearly 2,000 houses for lead paint. Three hundred children were referred for blood lead analysis, the most accurate way of getting clinical determinations. Mrs. A.A.'s two pre-school children tested below the blood lead level considered dangerous. But on February 1, at 6:20 a.m. the co-author of this paper was contacted by Mrs. A.A.:

> "Can you SPAN people help me" she wanted to know. My baby is so sick, I just don't know what to do". Mrs. A.A. explained that her four week old baby was unable to take nourishment. It was hungry but could ingest no more than 4 ounces of formula in a 24 hour period. It vomitted repeatedly, even in its fitful, exhausted sleep. She had altered the formula without positive results. The mother hadn't slept in four nights, fearing that the baby might choke. She took him back to the hospital and told her story to the emergency department staff. Two doctors examined the baby and pronounced him well. Mother reemphasized her plight. She requested X-Rays of the lungs and throat to determine if there was any blockage. She was told, "If you are such a good doctor why did you bring him here?" The doctors told

her to take the baby home, that it would be alright. She pleaded that they keep him overnight and that she would stay there to watch with them. One doctor replied, "We're not running a baby sitting service." At that the mother fainted. Mrs. Jones rechecked the details, then contacted the hospital's head of pediatrics, Dr. J. Based on her concern, the doctor reviewed the baby's medical record. It indicated that the baby had been on medication from his day of birth to discharge three days later. Also tests had been run during three days and even past the scheduled time of discharge. Yet the baby had been released to the mother as sound. Neither the diagnosis nor the nature of the test were reported to the mother.

The chief of pediatrics had mother and Mrs. Jones interview with a nurse practitioner. At Dr. J's request, mother filed a detailed report. The baby was readmitted for three days of observation and testing. But what of the mother's condition:

"Mrs. Jones, I wouldn't be so hurt, but I had all three of my babies at that hospital; they know all about me....I guess they did this 'cause I'm black...I never will have any more confidence in them."

That is the problem for too many families. There are too few services providers in whom they can have confidence. The real shame is in the fact that substantial material resources are so often placed in the charge of persons having little regard for people they label as disadvantaged. But Bernerdene Jones with the resources of her wits, ex-

perience and committment intervened in a hospital system and made it function for a family. Mama Hazel handled the Dean of Girl's role because she was accustomed to dealing with students as people.

A.M., indeed each SPAN worker, has a responsibility to persuade: persuade services providers to provide; parents to stick their necks out; to have confidence.

Some SPAN workers are better parent advisors than others. But each has talent. The project administration has the responsibility to help each worker to get it all together. That is the essence of our managerial task. To paraphrase an old axiom: "Who does what for whom, in what manner and with what effect", matters one hell of a lot. The effects of such judgements determine the quality of service, how one benefits from it and ultimately whether or not the provider is professional.

Decision-making power is the principal factor distinguishing Para from professional. Ostensibly, the credentialed person has more knowledge upon which to base his decisions. That is mainly true to the extent that professionals are part of the structure maintaining control of the channels over which technical knowledge flows.

Professionals are expected to and often are rewarded for buying into that structure, as is. Paraprofessionals are expected to seek the sanction of the professional.[1] The client population are against him performing this role accurately.

Professionals working with less-credentialed people must provide them with access to the data and the training to decipher it, so that respect for their judgement will grow multi-dimensionally.

In SPAN, there is Para and paraprofessional. SPAN, in the course of working with parents, children, school personnel and agencies, enters into the lives of people. The quality of being a "neighbor", is seen as professional activity. Valuing, rewarding, reinforcing this activity with technical and practical training are things the SPAN administration is trying to embrace.

Professionals who interact with paraprofessionals are asked to modify their own attitudes. Also, they are asked to place such responsibilities on their own agencies rather than allowing them to force paraprofessionals to be niggers.

Paras, whether as SPAN worker, psych aides, teacher aides, et.al., must always see what's wrong and never become accustomed to seeing needs unserved. When they can maintain that quality and also get agencies to meet families' needs, they are then PROFESSIONALS.

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